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ABSTRACT

Unlike many instruments used to measure the attitudes and practices of college composition teachers, the Survey of Attitudes and Practices of Teachers of Freshman Composition (SAPTFC) is based on a generalized theory of teaching at the college level, classifying instruction into three groups: didactic, heuristic, and philetic. In composition instruction, the didactic approach involves direct instruction in grammar and mechanics, with students reading and imitating professional models; the heuristic approach involves indirectly stimulating intellectual growth in students, by providing students with problems to work out on their own; and the philetic approach involves indirectly supporting the natural development of writing skills through free writing. To determine the consistency between expressed attitudes as reported by the SAPTFC and self-reported practices of composition instructors and to determine whether experienced instructors were more consistent in practices than inexperienced instructors, a study was conducted at Ohio's Ursuline College in 1996. The SAPTFC was administered to 303 instructors of first-year composition at 14 community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities in Ohio. The study found that while responses to the SAPTFC indicated that instructors favored heuristic and philetic approaches, the instructors themselves identified didactic approaches as most similar to their approach. In addition, no differences were found for instructors' level of experience. Contains 36 references. Data tables are appended. (AJL)

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Running head: CONSISTENCY OF COLLEGE COMPOSITION INSTRUCTORS

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Measuring the Consistency of the Attitudes and Practices of College Composition Instructors

James A. Salzman

Ursuline College

Presented at the Mid-Western Educational Research Association

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Measuring the Consistency of the Attitudes and Practices of College Composition Instructors[1]

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Introduction

Over the past twenty-five years efforts have been made to survey the attitudes and practices of teachers of composition in attempts to measure the constructs that make up individual teachers' orientations to the teaching of writing at the college level. However, attempts to measure these constructs have been limited and generally addressed in unsystematic ways. These efforts have suffered from flawed research designs (National Study of School Evaluation, 1981), limited or skewed samples (Emig & King, 1979; NCTE, 1972; Richardson, 1992; Singh & Ahluwal, 1980), or a lack of follow-up efforts (Gary & Brown, 1981). The majority of these instruments, when data on design was even available, only reported internal consistency measures. In most cases, content validity was determined by the expertise of the developer and reviewers; no other type of validity was measured. Few of them indicated any appeal to specific theoretical foundations in developing their instruments.

Because of these methodological concerns, the usefulness of these instruments was in question. In reviewing the research, with the exception of the NCTE Opinionnaire (1972), none of these instruments appeared to have been used outside of the studies for which they were developed. While the Survey of Attitudes and Practices of Teachers of Freshmen Composition (Kropp, 1983), or SAPTFC, suffered some of the same problems, specifically some concerns over the sample and the application of statistical measures attempting to estimate the criterion-related or construct validity, it showed promise as a useful instrument. Its foundation in a generalized theory of teaching at the college level, the application of that theory to the specifics of teaching composition, generally sound methodological design, and later validation (Salzman, 1996; Salzman & Newman, 1996) warranted its use in this study.

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[1] This document contains minor revisions of the paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois, October 2-5,1996.

The generalized theory upon which it was based was posited by Broudy (1972), who classified instruction into three superordinate groups: Didactics, Heuristics, and Philetics. In their briefest senses, these categories were exemplified in the following ways: didactic teaching was exemplified by ordered materials and presentations that imparted knowledge and developed skills that were observable; philetic teaching depended upon the ability of the teacher to be concerned for and encourage the intellectual and personal growth of the student; and heuristic teaching was exemplified by use of problem-solving methods of teaching that intended to develop in students the ability to think for themselves through the application of systematic methods. He contended that these "three types of teaching strategy or teaching style . . . differ in the kinds of results they can achieve, and although they are related, they are relatively independent of each other" (p. 255).

Didactics, Heuristics, and Philetics in the Composition Classroom

While Broudy's (1972) classifications were generalized across disciplines at the college level, these three schemes for viewing teaching can also be seen as ways that compositionists view their discipline. In designing, developing and testing the SAPTFC, Kropp (1983) operationalized these three approaches with a series of statements reflective of the attitudes and practices that were determined to be unique to each of them. She further assumed that attitudes were causes rather than correlates of practice. While the latter claim was disputed within the literature (Mischel, 1968; Richardson, Anders, Tidwell & Lloyd, 1991), numerous scholars (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Rosenberg & Hovland, 1966; Zimbardo & Ebbesen, 1970) agreed with the basic logic of this position.

In terms of practice, the teacher with a strong didactic orientation would fall neatly into the Current-Traditional paradigm (Berlin, 1985; Winterowd, 1994), a rhetorical approach which was based on positivistic notions, wherein reality and truth were located in the external, objective world and influenced by behaviorist psychology. The aim of improving one's didactics was to engage in the successful transmission of cultural traditions. This would be done through direct instruction in grammar and mechanics.

Students would be encouraged to read and imitate professional models, and they would be evaluated by the teacher's expertise and understanding of standards of excellence (Kropp, 1983). The Current-Traditional paradigm has been the dominant pedagogical stance within composition for the past 100 years (Berlin, 1985; Walsh, 1991; Winterowd, 1994) and remained evident in recent textbooks (Crews, 1992; Hodges & Whitten, 1986).

Statements that reflected a Philetics approach were based on the Subjective Rhetorical approach of the Expressivist (Berlin, 1985, Fulkerson, 1979) or Romantic Rhetoricians (Winterowd, 1994), whose aim was to support the natural development of writing skill. They achieved these aims indirectly through free writing and the employment of student-designed topics in an atmosphere of encouragement and positive conversation. Ideally, evaluation was by the students who recognized their growth in discussions with the instructor. The philetic approach shifted the focus of writing from a product-centered activity to a process-centered one (Berlin, 1985; Faigley, 1986; Winterowd, 1994). This approach had been heavily influenced by Macrorie, Coles and Elbow and was in evidence in recent college writing texts (Coles, 1988; Elbow & Belanoff, 1995; Sommers & McQuade, 1989).

Finally, the heuristic approach was based on a paradigm variously called New Rhetorical (Winterowd, 1994), Emerging Systems (Johnson, 1980), Mimetic (Fulkerson, 1979) or Transactional (Berlin, 1985), wherein the instructor's intention was to stimulate the growth of intellect in the students. This goal would be accomplished indirectly, with teachers setting problems and presenting systematic methods for discovering and working out ideas, and students designing and carrying out topics to address these problems. Ideally, evaluations would be withheld until near the end of the course with grades being determined by the students, their peers and the instructor. In the heuristic approach, reality was located in the interaction of the features of the rhetorical process (Berlin, 1985). While this approach dated to Aristotle, more recent texts (Lauer, Montague, Lunsford, & Emig, 1991; Ramage & Bean, 1995; Young, Becker, & Pike,

1970) have introduced students to heuristic procedures such as tagmemics, enthymemes, Toulmin's system of analysis, and others.

There was a strong and convincing body of literature demonstrating the acceptance of these three orientations within the field of composition. As it appeared that this body of literature held these three approaches to be relatively unique as expressions of attitude and practice, it would seem to follow that most, if not all, composition teachers would fall roughly into one of these three orientations. However, recent research into teachers' beliefs questioned the logic of this assumption.

Personal Theories as Obstacles to Effective Teaching

Research into these personal theories was relatively young, beginning in the eighties, and was important only in so far as it could improve the "practical effectiveness of the theories that teachers employ in conceptualizing their practice" (Ross, Cornett, & McCutcheon, 1992, p. 16). One problem with this conceptualization was that teachers often work from an implicitly held and private belief system (Clark & Peterson, 1990). Parker (1988) contended that teachers, by their very natures, were creators and users of theory. For teachers of writing, he then suggested that it was the "a priori personal theories of writing that teachers hold" (p. 20) that caused them to mis-theorize and, therefore, to mis-teach based on this mis-theorization. This dependence on personal beliefs, values and principles was a strong and deeply-embedded obstacle for teachers to overcome in their efforts to provide theoretically sound approaches to practice. Unexamined, these beliefs could negatively impact the alignment of theory with practice or, worse, could hamper teachers by forcing them to engage in an atheoretical or mis-theoretical practice.

Does knowledge of theory lead to more effective practice? Though arguable, a better way to consider this issue might be to ask: Can practice be truly effective when pursued in ignorance of theory? One would hope that most educators would answer "yes" to the initial question and "no" to the latter. If one chooses assignments in eclectic ways from a grab bag of possibilities without attention to the outcomes for learners or a theory of instruction designed to produce these outcomes, then what instructors and

learners are engaged in could hardly be considered a worthwhile educational enterprise. Educators, however, do have theories. The problem lies in the probability that many of these theories are personal, private theories which drive individuals' instructional practices yet have little to do with current scholarship (Clark & Peterson, 1990; Parker, 1988; Ross, Cornett, & McCutcheon, 1992).

In reviewing research into teachers' personal theories on writing instruction, Parker (1988) contended that:

> A person's network of personal constructs, which can be construed as her personal theory, controls her thoughts and actions. And, to the extent that a person's constructs are unarticulated and unexamined, or are impermeable, that person is locked into particular ways of acting and interpreting the world. On the other hand, if a person's constructs are permeable, and, if they are articulated and examined, that person may undertake a liberating reconstruction of her perspective. (p. 24)

It is the articulation and examination of theories for which the SAPTFC can be used. If the SAPTFC were used as a self-administered questionnaire with scoring information and interpretations, individual instructors or groups of instructors could respond to the items, score and interpret their responses, and engage in the "critical re-theorizing" (Parker, 1982) necessary to change and reconstruct their personal theories. This could be done in a time-efficient manner and as privately or publicly as individual instructors would choose. Instructors who note a disequilibration between their privately-held beliefs and the interpretation based on their answers to the SAPTFC could then choose to reject the instrument as flawed or pursue information and guidance that could prepare them to become more effective practitioners. In either case, by responding to the items and reflecting on the meaning of their responses as they impact on classroom practice, instructors have increased their own awareness of one perception of what they are doing in a classroom and how that could be interpreted. This could represent a first step in changing and improving individual practices.

Objectives

Much has been written about instructional practices at the post-secondary level with the intent of improving practice. Some scholars have contended that, where several

models of instruction are competing and no one of these models can be clearly demonstrated superior to the others, the choice of particular practices is less significant than the consistent application of practices that correlate with the guiding philosophy. Assuming this to be true, then the task is to measure a particular instructor's philosophical orientation and correlate that with practices common to that orientation. Kropp (1983) developed the SAPTFC, an instrument that is capable of distinguishing between three competing models indicative of attitudes and practices of composition instructors at the college level (Salzman, 1996; Salzman & Newman, 1996). The purpose of this paper is to introduce this instrument, the assumptions underlying its design and present data that support the value of looking at instructors in terms of this information. Specifically, the objectives were to:

1. determine the consistency between the expressed attitudes and self-reported practices of composition instructors as measured by the SAPTFC.
2. determine whether experienced instructors were more consistent in their practices than inexperienced instructors.

Methodology

Sample and Procedure

Instructors of first-year composition (n = 303) at 14 community colleges, four-year colleges and universities in Northeastern Ohio were surveyed about their attitudes towards and practices in teaching first-year writers by completing the SAPTFC (Kropp, 1983). Respondents included full-time and adjunct faculty, as well as graduate assistants. Individuals were asked to respond to 24 items related to their attitudes toward the goals, means of achieving the goals and evaluation standards utilized in assessing student writing competence. These items utilized a five-point Likert scale for responses ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. There were also 18 items indicating instructors' practices in their most recent composition course in terms of means and evaluation. These items also utilized a five-point Likert scale for responses ranging from Never Used to Constantly Used. The aggregate of 42 items was divided into three subscales of 14 items per orientation: Didactic, Heuristic, and Philetic. Instructors were

also asked to respond to three forced-choice items: (1) a statement on the primary purpose of composition instruction; (2) a statement most reflective of their teaching style; and (3) the acceptability of the instrument in measuring common attitudes and practices of first-year composition teachers.

The SAPTFC was used because it had shown itself to be a reliable (alpha = .833 for full-scale; .832 for Didactic subscale; .730 for Heuristic subscale; .843 for Philetic subscale) and valid instrument capable of distinguishing between the aforementioned orientations (Salzman, 1996; Salzman & Newman, 1996). In addition, when controlling for sex, types of institutions (i.e., public/private, two-year college, four-year college, four-year university), teaching preference (literature or composition), highest earned degree, and years of experience, criterion validity estimates for SAPTFC-measured responses yielded medium to large effect sizes when predicting instructors' responses to the primary purpose of composition and the statement most reflective of their teaching style (Salzman, 1996).

Data Analysis

Pearson correlation coefficients were obtained on attitudes and practices within each orientation and between the attitudes and practices of each of the orientations. Further analyses correlated the attitudes and practices of instructors with different years of experience to determine whether instructors with more experience tended to show more consistency between their attitudes and practices. For this purpose, instructors were grouped by every five years of experience. In addition, a frequency table was generated from instructors' responses to the statement on teaching style. The three descriptions were summaries of the operational definitions that were used to distinguish between orientations. Responses were divided into orientation by years of experience.

Results

In regards to the first objective, all three of the classifications -- Didactics ($r = .719$; $p < .0001$), Heuristics ($r = .559$; $p < .0001$), and Philetics ($r = .604$; $p < .0001$) -- demonstrated significant, positive relationships among the self-expressed attitudes and practices of subjects as measured by the SAPTFC (see Table 1). For all instructors,

Heuristic attitudes (M = 33.02) and practices (M = 21.47) and Philetic attitudes (M = 32.55) and practices (M = 22.88) were generally preferred over Didactic attitudes (M = 25.27) and practices (M = 16.33).

Table 1

Correlation Among Attitudes and Practices Subsections of the SAPTFC - All Instructors

Subscale	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Didactic Attitudes	25.27	6.05	—	.719*	.391*	.133*	-.091	-.240*
2. Didactic Practices	16.33	4.42		—	.283*	.075	-.094	-.226*
3. Heuristic Attitudes	33.02	4.29			—	.559*	.402*	.218*
4. Heuristic Practices	21.47	3.66				—	.432*	.459*
5. Philetic Attitudes	32.55	5.13					—	.604*
6. Philetic Practices	22.18	4.12						—

Note. n = 303. Alpha was set at .05. * = significance attained at less than .05 level. Except for Heuristic practices and Didactic attitudes, obtained $p < .0001$ for all significant correlations

The SAPTFC-measured scores would appear to indicate that instructors favored indirect, process-centered approaches to writing instruction, which are indicative of the Philetic and Heuristic orientations. However, when asked to identify the description of instruction most similar to their own from three choices representative of the different orientations, these same instructors overwhelmingly favored the explicit instruction description representative of Didactic orientation (see Table 2).

The second objective was to determine whether experienced instructors were more consistent in their practices than inexperienced ones. As one can see from Tables 3 through 7 (see Appendix A), regardless of experience (except for instructors with 11-15 years of experience on the Heuristic subscale) the relatively strong, positive correlations between the attitudes and practices of each of the orientations was statistically significant ($p < .05$). Also, regardless of experience, according to the mean scores derived for each of the subscales, instructors apparently preferred Heuristic and Philetic attitudes and

practices over those of the Didactic orientation. However, except for those relatively inexperienced instructors with zero to five years of experience, the apparent acceptance of these indirect, process-oriented methods and beliefs is contradicted by the overwhelming preference for explicit instruction of the Didactic orientation (see Table 2).

Table 2

Frequencies of Self-identified Instructional Orientation by Years of Experience

	Years of Experience					
Orientation	0 - 5	6 - 10	11 - 15	16 - 20	21 +	Totals
1. Didactic	43	36	18	12	22	131
2. Heuristic	30	15	6	8	11	70
3. Philetic	45	15	7	10	6	83
4. Missing values	7	3	3	2	4	19

Note. n = 303.

Discussion

When one looks at the correlations of attitudes and practices, it would appear that there is a great deal of consistency in the ways in which instructors conceive of their practices and in the ways in which they act upon those practices. Accepting the notion that one should align theory and practice, it would then appear that the instructors in this sample have done so, at least in terms of their responses to the Likert-scaled responses. If it were true, however, that theory and practice were aligned, then one would not anticipate such a large preference (see Table 2) for the explicit, somewhat linear instructional practices described by the Didactic orientation when the SAPTFC-measured responses indicate a substantial adherence to Philetic and Heuristic attitudes and practices. Only in the case of relatively new instructors (see Tables 2 and 3) does one see strong evidence of agreement between self-identified orientation and the SAPTFC-measured scores.

It has reasonably been argued that the Current-Traditional paradigm (Broudy's Didactic orientation) still reigns in college composition classes. That has certainly been

supported by instructors' responses to the description of teaching style reflective of their own practices. In the past twenty years, however, compositionists have espoused the benefits of a process-oriented approach to writing instruction. In this case, one would suspect that the most experienced teachers might hold most dearly to that paradigm. This group did have the highest mean scores on the Didactic subscale (see Table 7). They also had the greatest variability and strongest correlation in that subscale. However, even in this sub-sample of "grizzled veterans," mean scores for both Philetic and Heuristic attitudes and practices were higher than those of the Didactic orientation. This may indicate that the Current-Traditional paradigm is no longer as strong within college English departments as it once was, and that instructors of first-year writers are aware of and implementing process-oriented approaches even while appearing to hold firm to the paradigm that had dominated college instruction when they began.

Alternatively, these results may demonstrate in microcosm the tension between the linear nature of explicit instruction and the recursive and transactional natures of process approaches that is being played out in higher education at present. In almost every category, these veterans showed the largest variability from the mean and the greatest consistency. These results would seem to support that the individuals in this category may be most aware of aligning their attitudes and practices but that there is not a consensus on one best way to teach writing.

By looking at the other end, at instructors with 5 or fewer years of experience, it would appear that the tide in this war is shifting. These instructors preferred, by a slight margin, the polar opposite view represented by a concern for the individual writer's growth, a stance generally associated with the Expressivists. Since many of these inexperienced instructors were graduate assistants or recent graduates of master's programs, much of this may be explained by their participation in graduate seminars in current composition theory. A more cynical explanation may be that an interest in student growth, evident in the Philetic orientation, enables one to avoid academic rigor and substitute a "feel-good" course in place of the composition course that students need. By a large margin, though, this group appears to have accepted the less direct methods

espoused in the question on teaching style (see Table 2). The Heuristic model, using indirect methods to spur intellectual growth, may act as that bridge between academic rigor and a concern for students.

By only considering correlation coefficients, one may wrongly conclude that instructors, regardless of experience, have effectively aligned theory and practice. This may be, as much as any other explanation, evidence of a weakness in using a self-administered survey. Recognizing that as a possible weakness, however, what one is left with is, individual instructors perceive themselves as thinking and acting in this way. Whether one starts with the attitudes or the practices, effecting change in individuals can benefit from the self-introspection necessary to complete a survey instrument. Combined with other methods, such as systematic observation or collegial discussions, completion of the survey can begin individuals' efforts to improve their practices.

Educational Implications

Effective practice demands careful consideration of the implicit and explicit theories that drive the choices faculty make within classrooms. Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) argued that what is important is for "teachers to become conscious of the philosophical dimensions of their work because nothing short of that consciousness will make instruction sensible and deliberate" (p. 2). In attempting to make instruction both sensible and deliberate, the SAPTFC can be used as a way for teachers to become aware of what their current practices are and with what theory those practices are aligned, if indeed they appear to be aligned with any theory. Assuming that they consider their practices effective, by investigating the theory that instructors currently hold, according to the interpretation of their scores on the instrument, they may discover other practices that are consistent with what they already believe but of which they were unaware. If, however, instructors believe their current practices to be ineffective, completing the questionnaire may lead them to consider other practices in light of this new awareness.

The previous contention also relates to the use of the SAPTFC as an intervention tool. While not dealing with the target population of the current study, Shrofel (1991) may have summed it up best when she stated:

> [C]onfrontation was the center of what happened . . . . When I confronted myself as a teacher, examining my assumptions about teaching writing and the results of my practices, I developed as a teacher, learner, writer, and person. When my students confronted themselves, they developed as teachers, learners, and writers, and acquired new beliefs about the teaching/learning of writing. (p. 176)

In confronting their own attitudes and beliefs regarding best practices for the teaching of writing, the SAPTFC can be used as a tool to assist graduate assistants and undergraduate preservice English teachers. After responding to the SAPTFC, the scores attained and interpretations of those scores could promote lively discussions in graduate seminars for teaching assistants and in class for preservice English teachers. (Risking sacrilege, even veteran professors, especially those steeped in the literary tradition common to most higher education institutions, may benefit from this exercise). These discussions could facilitate these active and aspiring teachers to reconsider some of the pervasive attitudes toward and practices of writing to which they currently subscribe. This reconsideration could lead to more humane and pedagogically sound practices than some of them had experienced and which, left unconsidered, could be negatively impacting their own practices to the detriment of student writers.

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APPENDIX A

Table 3

Correlation Among Attitudes and Practices Subsections of the SAPTFC - Instructors with 5 or Fewer Years of Experience

Subscale	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Didactic Attitudes	24.94	6.25	—	.756*	.485*	.175	.051	-.173*
2. Didactic Practices	16.42	4.34		—	.384*	.176*	-.021	-.196*
3. Heuristic Attitudes	33.17	4.73			—	.622*	.484*	.189*
4. Heuristic Practices	21.52	4.03				—	.455*	.413*
5. Philetic Attitudes	33.33	5.07					—	.579*
6. Philetic Practices	23.21	3.92						—

Note. n = 125. Alpha was set at .05. * = significance attained at less than .05 level.

Table 4

Correlation Among Attitudes and Practices Subsections of the SAPTFC - Instructors with 6 to 10 Years of Experience

Subscale	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Didactic Attitudes	26.04	5.23	—	.636*	.435*	.159	.101	-.156
2. Didactic Practices	17.01	4.30		—	.428*	.042	.008	-.216*
3. Heuristic Attitudes	33.28	3.53			—	.464*	.074	.112
4. Heuristic Practices	21.80	2.97				—	.316*	.519*
5. Philetic Attitudes	32.32	4.52					—	.504*
6. Philetic Practices	22.16	3.79						—

Note. n = 69. Alpha was set at .05. * = significance attained at less than .05 level.

Table 5

Correlation Among Attitudes and Practices Subsections of the SAPTFC - Instructors with 11 to 15 Years of Experience

Subscale	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Didactic Attitudes	24.47	5.30	—	.634*	.348*	-.068	-.351*	-.252
2. Didactic Practices	15.32	3.45		—	.237	-.020	-.236	-.214
3. Heuristic Attitudes	32.88	3.67			—	.273	.445*	.127
4. Heuristic Practices	21.21	3.23				—	.368*	.508*
5. Philetic Attitudes	31.76	5.10					—	.529*
6. Philetic Practices	20.42	3.35						—

Note. n = 34. Alpha was set at .05. * = significance attained at less than .05 level.

Table 6

Correlation Among Attitudes and Practices Subsections of the SAPTFC - Instructors with 16 to 20 Years of Experience

Subscale	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Didactic Attitudes	24.63	6.36	—	.737*	.467*	.395*	-.215	-.212
2. Didactic Practices	15.59	4.78		—	.346	.253	-.203	-.325
3. Heuristic Attitudes	32.81	4.54			—	.624*	.457*	.171
4. Heuristic Practices	21.38	3.32				—	.458*	.452*
5. Philetic Attitudes	32.09	5.21					—	.688*
6. Philetic Practices	21.81	4.22						—

Note. n = 32. Alpha was set at .05. * = significance attained at less than .05 level.

Table 7

Correlation Among Attitudes and Practices Subsections of the SAPTFC - Instructors with 21 or More Years of Experience

Subscale	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Didactic Attitudes	26.12	6.97	—	.753*	.079	-.049	-.358*	-.480*
2. Didactic Practices	16.30	5.14		—	-.157	-.225	-.261	-.361*
3. Heuristic Attitudes	32.44	4.47			—	.558*	.441*	.436*
4. Heuristic Practices	21.05	4.13				--	.511*	.533*
5. Philetic Attitudes	31.63	6.02					—	.698*
6. Philetic Practices	20.93	5.20						—

Note. n = 43. Alpha was set at .05. * = significance attained at less than .05 level.